

Unnamed - Apparatus Of Change

Available Power : 10

Authority : 6

Bind Insect (1, Command)

Fortify Space (2, Domain)

Distant Vision (2, Perceive)

Collect Plant (3, Shape)

See Commands (5, Perceive)

Bind Crop (4, Command)

Nobility : 4

Congeal Glimmer (1, Command)

See Domain (1, Perceive)

Claim Construction (2, Domain)

Stone Pylon (2, Shape)

Empathy : 4

Shift Water (1, Shape)

Imbue Mending (3, Civic)

Bind Willing Avian (1, Command)

Move Water (4, Shape)

Spirituality : 5

Shift Wood (1, Shape)

Small Promise (2, Domain)

Make Low Blade (2, War)

Congeal Mantra (1, Command)

Form Party (3, Civic)

Ingenuity : 4

Know Material (1, Perceive)

Form Wall (2, Shape)

Link Spellwork (3, Arcane)

Sever Command (4, War)

Tenacity : 4

Nudge Material (1, Shape)

Bolster Nourishment (2, Civic)

Drain Endurance (2, War)

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Animosity : -

Amalgamate Human (3, Command)

Yuea lays on her bed in what used to be the private chambers of the commander of this fort. She has informed us that, since she might fall apart or burst or crumble or some other lethal thing, that she wants to be comfortable.

I haven't actually brought a bee in here, and Yuea has been rather sneakily diligent about keeping Oob and his brethren out too. So I'm a little surprised that this room is even in use, and I am rather unsurprised that Yuea has done very little to clean it up.

There is a balcony attached to it, overlooking the side of the fort faces deeper into the green. Well, there is what is left of it. The door appears to have been smashed outward, and while Yuea has kicked the splinters away, there is no hiding the missing half of the balcony. She's just left the door open, which I make note of for the next time I need to bother her and my bees need an ingress.

The rest of the room is equally in tatters. A wardrobe we looted for the more comfortable sets of pants and boots, a basin Yuea seems to have been using as storage for scavenged bullets she's found around the fort, a smashed table and chair and bloodstains to match from a fight before we got here.

"Why in the gnawing sky do you sleep *here*?" Mela asks with a kind of dark wonder.

"I've got a good view of what's left of Auor." Yuea shrugs from her spot. She's laying like she's waiting for some kind of dark ritual from a storybook. Which, for all I know about the process of making magetouched, is something she's used to. "Besides, it's not like I need the door. I'll get Sir Rock to remake it if we live through summer and I actually feel cold again."

Auor? I write the word as a question onto the remaining bedpost between Mela and Jahn.

They're the only two here. Malpa is trying to comfort Muelly, and I'm keeping a half-focused eye on them to make sure nothing *happens*. Seraha is tucking the children in. The gobs are cleaning the kitchen and believe that I believe them to already be in bed where they belong - the childish antics of the gob species are nights I as the scholar remember both fondly and with a deep personal sarcasm. And Kalip...

I told Kalip that with Yuea perhaps out of commission for a while, we needed him on watch. He agreed. Which is to say, both of us politely decided not to say that he didn't want to be present if she died.

"If she doesn't make it..." He is right now whispering into the night breeze, his words caught by some of my nearby bees, "she'd be furious if you didn't take everything you could."

I don't answer, and turn my focus back to the bedroom, where Jahn has noticed my question. 'Ah. It was a smaller world above our own. Before my own birth, a human mage weapon broke it to pieces. This was before borders were drawn up as they are... were... now."

"Wait, no!" Mela jumps in. "It was a demon ritual, wasn't it? That's what... they... taught..." She and Jahn share a look that carries a lot of small revelations.

But for me, I'm less focused on the fact that governments lie to their people and more on the nature of the lie. *I'm sorry, the moon is gone?!* I direct the half dozen growing glimmer and mantra filled bees in the room to the balcony, perching on what's left of the railing to stare up at the sky in sudden panic. My panic; the bees don't understand why I'm feeling this way, but they're eager to help. But all they can see is a blurred series of lighted dots above us in the dark; their vision at range still not quite up to parity with even a human child.

"Well it's not *gone* really." Mela starts as my bees reenter one by one.

"Quite a bit of it is still there." Jahn adds, almost sheepishly.

"During stormtime, the smaller bits move through the sky and light up like magic!" Mela grins. "It's an omen of good luck, if you see one in your favorite color."

"Or a reminder of past follies, if any of the larger pieces falter and fall." Jahn nods. "I had... I was... for the first time, I was going to help make the rolls, for the ceremony this year..." He glances away, half flinching as Mela instinctively puts a hand on his arm.

Yuea shatters the small moment, as she is wont to do. "If you two are done?" She grumbles, having folded her arms without relaxing from her stiff positions laying like she's afraid a sergeant is about to start yelling at her for poor posture. "I'm dying for the boredom here."

"You're dying from your own hubris." Jahn snapped, though with no malice in his voice. "The boredom is simply because you are insufferable."

Yuea huffs and rolls away from the demon, indignant. "Alright, that's it. Shiny? Go ahead and do it now. If it kills me, I don't care anymore. At least I'll escape these-"

I alight bees on the corners of the bedding, with another on the surviving bedpost, and the last on Mela's shoulder. Before I begin, I consecrate the space around the bed, **Link Spellwork** bringing together an inverted **Drain Endurance** and **Fortify Space** to let the stolen stamina I have kept pooled in my spells begin to feed back into Yuea.

And then I stop listening to everyone, as for the first time, I being to cast **Amalgamate Human**, stirring the arcane machinery in my mind to life and setting its power upon the woman laying on the bed.

If I had done this blind, then I would be both a fool, and in a great deal of trouble. Which, I am assuming, is what happened to the other apparatus. Either that, or simple malice and apathy. But I am no fool. Despite my distaste for the outside magic that has been unwillingly grafted to my souls, I am not one to ignore the reality of our world.

And so I have been studying the spell. Its construction and patterns, the way it sits within my mind. I have not *used* it, even to target nothing at all, for fear of something going wrong. But I can look, and importantly, I can compare.

I can see the markings that act as anchor points for tethers, just as with **Bind Insect**. Underneath them, there are patterns and shapes that allow for the application of will across the tethers. Spots like locks waiting for keys in the shape of **Congea! Glimmer** or **Congea! Mantra** wait at the edges, feeding back into the anchors, to let me enhance whatever is hooked into this spell. And I can see the... well I suppose I would call it the *weight* of the magic. The size of the working, how much of its own reserve of power it would require to begin moving the arcane from theoretical to real.

But more importantly, I can see that this is a spell that demands material. Several pieces in fact. Not in the same way that **Bind Insect** or **Bind Willing Avian** demand the form of one of their future bound in order to truly work. But material the way my shaping spells use it. A human body, yes, but also *something else*.

Form Wall calls for physical material. **Stone Pylon** asks for... well, stone. When I create my refreshing oasis from **Fortify Space**, **Link Spellwork** forms within it something that 'asks' for the output of **Drain Endurance**; a form of magically liquified quality that I store like an aqueduct. Even **Bind Insect** has a small place that requests the stored shades of the fallen, waiting to recreate old bodies in newly hatched bees.

All of them distinct. All of them, to me, recognizable. And **Amalgamate Human** places its demand for something to work with as a series of options that could fit *any* of those things. I suspect that it could even take the entirety of a working spell, if I gave it enough time and effort and perhaps a mental shove.

I don't *know* what it would do if I gave it nothing. But the demands here are not polite requests, they are a yawning void that threatens to consume whatever they can if not fed. And while I had somewhat planned for this, the raw feeling of teetering above a bottomless pit like this is unsettling. Horrifying.

What would it pull in, if I didn't have anything to offer? This is quite painfully clearly the spell that its previous owner used to make the beasts that guarded this fort. What did it *take* to make those things of grey hide and toothy heads? I would shudder, if I could, to find out. I dread that something similar might happen to my own usage.

But I have planned for this.

Amalgamate Human. Here is your target; this person. Yuea, is her name. The spell does not care. I'm not even sure it cares for what I think of as 'human' at this point. Here is your first resource; a body. Yuea's body. The spell does not care that she is using it.

Here are your other materials. **Congea! Glimmer**, the spell cast into the waiting space and not added wholesale. Two things out of the stockpile I have made of **Collect Plant**; several coils of noose vine, and pieces of a tree I cannot name that I stole from deeper in the Green. And finally, the shade of a crow. I do not know why, but the spell demands five parts, and this one... sings to me, as I complete the collection, placing it in the spell one point to the side of Yuea's own body.

I do not let the magic act on its own. But my guidance, while fresh, is not without expertise. I know the anatomy of a person, from time as a scholar and soldier. I know the ins and outs of the natural materials I have chosen from life as a farmer. And from this life, I know Yuea herself.

My mind pushes as I begin to weave the objects together. The spell yields easily, the tether of obedience and command forming stronger and stronger as I make changes and adapt her body to suit the magic's whims.

Muscles burned and atrophied from magetouch overdose, I wrap and intermingle with noose vine, changing what it means at a base level for her to move her arms and legs, but adding a robust strength to them that will grow with her over time. Skin and bark I smooth together, shifting Yuea's color as I purge lingering infections and wipe away cuts, leaving her with rough but even ridges along her flesh. I fuse a glimmer with her liver, physically capping the influx of the stuff that made her magetouched and now threatens to kill her, and hold back panic as she stops breathing. Her eyes going wide as the changes take hold over the course of seconds. But as the formation finishes, her heart hammers again, spreading something new through her blood that the spell informs me in an almost polite way will be 'useful'. And finally, I press the shade of the fallen crow against her, letting the last echos of the bird's sarcasm mix with Yuea's own, changes forming across her chest and head as I let another's influence guide itself to where it finds appropriate.

Outside the magic, the scene is far less straightforward or clean. My bees watch as her body falls apart, and Mela and Jahn back away rapidly. Skin cracks and shifts and reforms, her hair sloughs off in clumps. Yuea twists as I apply my touches, her limbs tensing and popping with wet cracks as her body changes.

When she stops breathing, and tries to get an arm up to claw at her throat, she nearly dislocates her shoulder as she moves muscles she has no practice with. Jahn tries to hold her arm down, but Yuea's facade of confidence shatters as her panicked eyes widen and her heart stops completely for a moment. She struggles, more of her skin breaking away, leaving behind the flexible and tender bark that will be her new body's outer layer from now on. But it's hard to tell that the change is complete when she is coated in her own blood from a thousand tiny breaches.

She thrashes away from Jahn, and a reluctantly moving Mela who seems terrified to try to help. Rolling frantically across the bed, Yuea topples off the side with a heavy crunch just as the last of the changes take hold. Parts of her eyes liquify and run down the corners of her face, mucus

spills from her nose, and a crown of grey-black feathers sprouting from her bald head, replacing her hair with a fledgling's poofy and unkempt plumage.

And then the spell is done. The tether is in place. Her body is as it will be, for the rest of her life, or until I change her again, if that is even an option.

She thrashes from her place on the floor, struggling to pull herself up, rapidly moving limbs she has no practice with. With one hand grasping like a talon, she grips onto the side of the bedding and hauls, yanking her new body upward and before pitching forward onto her knees as she pants heavily.

"Oka-" She gets halfway through the word before she twists and vomits onto the floor. A stream of black blood and a terrifyingly visible corrosive magic pouring out of her as she heaves her insides out. Yuea coughs one last time, a gasp of air like the last puff of breath she has in her, and tilts sideways into the bed. "...wasn't so bad..." she mutters woozily.

Then she topples forward into the puddle of her own blood. And a spray of soft motes explodes out from her as she hits the floor.

"Fuck!" Mela yells, the spell broken as she bolts around the ruined bed, Jahn right on her heels. She slides down and checks for a pulse, but can't find one, though she relaxes as she sees Yuea is still breathing. "Is she okay?" She demands, looking up at where my bees have clustered, the insects wisely retreating when Yuea started throwing thrashing kicks that could have snapped them in half.

I try to find an untouched wooden surface near Mela to write on, but everything is either too small or too covered in gore. So instead, I simply ask my bees to nod as a unit, bobbing their large bodies in a reassuring indication that everything is going to be fine.

Mela sighs, and drops back onto her heels, inching away from the pool of Yuea's vomited blood. "Okay." She sighs, and then looks up at Jahn. "Can you help me carry her? And then... uh... help me... clean... this..." her face twists into an unpleasant wince. "Oh hook and eye, she *smells...*"

Jahn makes a noise like he's threatening to empty his stomach as well. "I will... get Kalip." He says wisely. "I'm sure he will carry her."

I would offer to help, but my bees are only so large.

But it's alright. It worked. It *worked*. Not as some emergency measure, not as a last ditch patchwork effort. The spell didn't twist her into something nightmarish. It did what I told it to, just like any good tool would.

I'm not sure what relieves me more. That Yuea isn't now a monster, or that *I'm* not.

Either way. I hope she'll forgive me for ruining her bed.